

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4071

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

USINT BAGHDAD

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E.O. 11652: N/A

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SUBJECT: RABIN BEGINS HIS CAMPAIGN

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: ON THE HEELS OF HIS APPARENTLY HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL (AT LEAST IN ISRAELI EYES) ATTENDANCE AT THE SOCIALIST INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS IN GENEVA, PRIME MINISTER YITZHAK RABIN HAS TAKEN SEVERAL STEPS WHICH, IN EFFECT, HAVE SERVED TO INAUGURATE THE LABOR PARTY'S CAMPAIGN FOR NEXT YEAR'S ELECTION AS WELL AS HIS PERSONAL CAMPAIGN FOR ENDORSEMENT AS THE PARTY'S STANDARD BEARER. HIS INTENTION TO MAKE FOREIGN POLICY THE MAIN CAMPAIGN ISSUE IS CLEARLY TAKING SHAPE AMID GENERAL ISRAELI SATISFACTION THAT HIS CALL FOR A HELSINKI-TYPE CONFERENCE MOMENTARILY TOOK THE INITIATIVE FROM SADAT IN THE CURRENT PEACE OFFENSIVE. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF WIDESPREAD ATTENTION AND UNCOMMON PRAISE BY THE LOCAL PRESS FOR THE HELSINKI PROPOSAL AND THE SIC'S PRO-ISRAEL RESOLUTION, RABIN FOLLOWED UP WITH A SERIES OF SPEECHES TO THE PARTY FAITHFUL, INCLUDING MAJOR ADDRESSES IN TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM, AND A VISIT TO THE PORT OF ASHKELON FOR THE CITY'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY. END SUMMARY.

2. ON DECEMBER 2, FRESH FROM GENEVA, RABIN ADDRESSED THE LABOR PARTY'S CENTRAL COMMITTEE ANALYZING THE SITUATION ON

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ISRAEL'S BORDERS AND TAKING PRIDE IN THE IDF'S CURRENT

STRONG SITUATION WHICH "PROVIDES CLOSE TO MAXIMUM FREEDOM FOR POLITICAL MANEUVER." (NOT SURPRISINGLY, RABIN DID NOT MENTION THAT THE IDF, WHICH HE LAUDED, HAS BEEN GREATLY STRENGTHENED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF HIS INTRA-PARTY RIVAL, DEFENSE MINISTER SHIMON PERES). RABIN APPEARED SELF-CONFIDENT, SPOKE WELL (FOR HIM) AND HIS TALK WAS WELL RECEIVED. HE HELD FORTH AGAIN BEFORE THE JERUSALEM BRANCH OF THE LABOR PARTY ON DECEMBER 6 IN WHAT WAS IN FACT BILLED AS THE CAMPAIGN KICKOFF. TICKING OFF HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACHIEVEMENTS DURING ITS TWO AND ONE-HALF YEARS IN OFFICE, HE DREW A SHARP DISTINCTION BETWEEN LABOR'S PRAGMATISM IN FOREIGN POLICY AND THE "DECLARATIVE ZIONISM" OF THE LIKUD AND ITS FOREBEARS.

3. RE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY, THE RECENT DECISION BY THE HISTADRUT'S LABOR PARTY CAUCUS TO RECOMMEND ADVANCING THE DATE OF THE HISTADRUT ELECTION IS GENERALLY SEEN AS PART OF RABIN'S PLAN TO MAKE FOREIGN POLICY THE PRIMARY ISSUE IN THE KNESSET CAMPAIGN (SEE SEPTTEL). LABOR EXPECTS THAT AN EARLY HISTADRUT ELECTION--PROBABLY IN JUNE--WOULD HELP TO DELEGATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE KNESSET CAMPAIGN, JUST AS THAT CAMPAIGN HEATS UP. ISRAELI INITIATIVES SUCH AS INTRODUCING A RESOLUTION IN THE UNGA TO RECONVENE THE GENEVA CONFERENCE --WHILE INTENDED NO DOUBT PRIMARILY FOR ITS EFFECT ON WORLD PUBLIC OPINION--SHOULD ALSO HELP TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS DURING THE CAMPAIGN.

4. WHILE NOT EXACTLY A NEW RABIN, HIS GENEVA AND LOCAL SPEECHES SEEM TO REFLECT A DETERMINATION TO MOUNT AN EARLY POLITICAL OFFENSIVE TO COUNTER THE CRITICISM HE IS RECEIVING FROM MANY QUARTERS AND THE MALAISE WITHIN HIS PARTY. TWO MEETINGS LAST MONTH ATTENDED BY LABOR PARTY STALWARTS HIGHLIGHTED DISCONTENT WITHIN THE RANKS AND FOCUSED ON THE NEED TO REVITALIZE THE PARTY. ONE GATHERING CONSISTED PRIMARILY OF PARTY VETERANS; THE OTHER WAS MAINLY OF YOUNG ACTIVISTS. BOTH EXPRESSED DISSATISFACTION WITH THE STATE OF THE PARTY AND, PREDICTABLY, THE YOUNGER GROUP CALLED FOR NEW FACES IN THE PARTY LEADERSHIP.

5. RABIN'S RECENT INTERVIEW WITH COLUMNIST JOSEPH KRAFT, IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WHICH HE OUTLINED HIS CAMPAIGN GAME-PLAN FOR EMPHASIZING FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INDICATED THAT A U.S. INITIATIVE ON AN ARAB-ISRAEL SETTLEMENT WOULD HELP HIM, HAS ALSO DRAWN CRITICISM--GENERALLY FROM OUTSIDE LABOR PARTY RANKS. THUS, HE HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE ON SECURE BORDERS FOR THE SAKE OF ELECTION ADVANTAGE. BUT THE OVERALL PICTURE AT THIS POINT IS OF A RABIN WHO HAS UPSTAGED PERES (FOR THE MOMENT AT LEAST), HAS BEGUN SOME NEEDED PARTY

WORK, AND HAS INDICATED THAT HE MEANS TO DETERMINE THE
PRIORITIES OF THE CAMPAIGN.
DUNNIGAN

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